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## **"THE GIRL WHO WAS ALWAYS HUNGRY"**

*A MEMOIR WRITTEN BY RENEE KATZ*

### *Synopsis-*

It was September 1939, Renee was a little girl just shy of four, when the Germans invaded her small town of Wyszkw, located just outside Warsaw. She was one of four children who began a long difficult journey on foot one night with her mother and three siblings as she looked back in wonder while her small village burned down. Her father Yitzhak, always one step ahead of the family foraging for food and supplies, miraculously caught up with them in Bialystok a few days later. Her and her family, Polish Jews caught up in the worst of times, walked into the dark night not knowing if they would ever come home again. This journey that led her and her family from Warsaw to Bialystok to Siberia and back through Middle Asia is told through the eyes of a child, and was riddled with fear, hunger, hope, sorrow and survival. Renee's innate optimism and her ability to see the small gifts in life as they occasionally presented themselves during the war shines through every page. At the end of their journey ending up in a DP camp in Salzburg Austria she was now only one of two, her and her brother Moishe were the only children in the family that survived. The uniqueness of this account is that in addition to the bravery of her and her family's survival she also takes us on a very unusual culinary tour of the Holocaust, from her favorite blueberry turnovers called "Jagejankes" to her mother's desperate substitute for baby milk, which was a water and sugar concoction that she intuitively knew would keep her baby alive just a little longer. The lack of food, and her focus on not having enough to eat during this war-time is a thread that carries us throughout the entire account of her survival. She recalls a series of seemingly unrelated yet crucial life saving decisions both her parents made along the way, like rejecting the offer to become Russian citizens which resulted in their exile to Siberia, or her father randomly buying a cow once they arrived at the Siberian barracks in Syktyvkar. These small decisions ultimately saved their lives and also propelled them further along a three thousand mile journey into the depths of Siberia and back through middle Asia until they landed at a DP camp in Austria after the war and ultimately ended up in Brooklyn, NY where she met her husband Norman in 1958, a fellow survivor, and raised three children, Nat, Warren and Michelle.



## Renee Katz Biography:

Born October 25, 1935 (this date is an approximation because of lost birth certificates).

Renee's US official birthdate is July 12, 1937.

Born in Wyszkow in 1935, Poland Renee survived the Holocaust with her mother, father and brother by being exiled to Siberia and journeying by boat, train and foot to Kazakhstan, where they stayed until the war ended. Her, her brother Moishe, mother Cywya and father Yitzhok all survived and emigrated to the United States in 1951. Her sister Sarah Leah and brother Aaron Luzer both perished during the war. Renee married Norman Katz in 1959 and had three children, Nat, Warren and Michelle and has four grandchildren Jessica, Sarah, Noah and Hannah. For many years she owned her own business, a flea market stand in Queens and New Jersey called "Renee's Fashions" she was very entrepreneurial however had to forego many of her dreams to raise her children and take care of her family. She and her husband, both survivors, had many emotional scars and therefore had a difficult time, at times raising a family. But they did, successfully, and now Renee a retired widower lives in both Lake Worth, Florida and Staten Island New York where she raised her children. Her story cannot be forgotten or overlooked because it is these small, and seemingly insignificant stories that hold some precious pearls of how to survive the unsurvivable.



# **The Girl Who Was Always Hungry**

Written by Renee Katz

## **Chapter I**

September, 1939, Wyszokow, Poland

It was early in the morning, and it was very quiet in the house. I remember looking out the window and it was a beautiful sunny day. All of a sudden, my mother ran into the house and was telling all of us children, "hurry up and get dressed," we have to go, she kept on saying, "quickly." We got dressed in a hurry, she was taking whatever she could carry, and she took some things for my little sister, who was about 9 months old at the time. We were four siblings, two boys and two girls. My brother Moishe was 8, Aaron Luzer was 6, I was almost 4, my Polish name was Rena, and my sister Sarah Leah was almost 9 months old.

We ran into the street, I saw planes overhead, bombs coming down, people running, some people got hit and were lying dead on the ground, and we were running. My mother was holding my sister, Sarah Leah, in her arms. I was holding on to my grandfather. My mother's father, my grandfather, Yankel, lived with us. On that September day, when the city was bombed, we ran out of the house, and we ran to a neighbor, not far from where we lived. His name was Shkarlat; they were a prominent family in Wyszokow, a small town just outside of Warsaw. There were several other families that gathered there - men, women and children. Shkarlat's house was big and well built, and my mother thought it would be safer to stay there for a while, until we decided where to go.

The next day the Germans took all the men away, never to be seen again. My father was not with us at the time. He was drafted into the Polish Army two weeks before the war. He was in the Polish cavalry and he told us that once he fell off the horse, while he was in training, and was in the hospital for several weeks. The army saved my father's life.

When it got dark outside, the Germans came in with rifles and started to yell "alle Juden raus" which means, all Jews out. We started to walk, it was dark outside. The whole town of Wyszokow was dark, we were holding on to each other. The German soldiers were following us on horses. They were riding on the horses next to us in a single file. I was holding on to my mother's hand or her skirt, she was also holding my little sister, Sarah Leah, in her arms. One German soldier noticed that my brother, Aaron Luzer, was tired, he was sickly and couldn't walk any more, and he asked



my mother if he could take my brother on his horse. My mother got very nervous, she thought he was taking him away, but this soldier was very kind and after a while, he put my brother down, and handed him back to my mother.

We walked like this for many hours. Some people had small valises; others had bundles of clothes that they carried on their backs. There was no yelling or screaming, the mood was somber. The German soldiers were riding on the horses next to us and everybody was afraid of what they might do, so nobody wanted to antagonize them. There were mostly women and children walking that night. The soldiers were on the horses on the right side of us, I turned to look to the left and I saw our town on fire. I said to my mother "look at that big fire" she nodded. Wyszkwow was burning and we were walking, where we were going, nobody knew. We were all scared, holding on to each other, wondering what will happen to us, and how many of us will survive this journey. I don't know how long or how many miles we walked, but we finally arrived in a town called Jadow.

My father came looking for us in Wyszkwow. He went to the Polish bakery, to see Panie Dudeck, with whom my family did business. My father inquired as to what happened to us and the rest of the Jews in town, he was told by Dudek to get out as quickly as possible, because the Germans are looking for him. Most of the Jews in Wyszkwow left or went into hiding. The Germans didn't know who was Jewish or Gentile unless pointed out by the Polish locals.

My father followed the same route that we took. Panie Dudeck told my father that the Jews were traveling east, towards Russia, and he went the same direction and caught up with us in Jadow.

After walking for so many days, we ate up whatever food we took with us, there wasn't much food left. My mother ran out of milk for my baby sister, and all she was able to feed her was water that she filled up the bottle with. One day early in the morning after filling up the bottle with water, she was asking around if anyone could spare some sugar, so that she could add it to the water, she figured it would be more nourishing than just plain water. Somebody did give her a small amount of sugar and I watched as she sat down next to a tree and put the nipple in little Sarah's mouth. She would have liked to feed her with milk, but she couldn't get any, so water was the best she could do at the time.

From Jadow, we took a train to Bialystok. We moved into a big house with several other families. It was late fall or early winter, because it was very cold in the house and it was snowing and the snow was piling up outside of the house, as well. Even though it was so cold inside, some people opened up the windows, to try and get the smell out. With so many families living



together, the odor was very strong. Most of us didn't have the proper clothing, because when we ran out of our homes, we took only what we could carry. My father found some rags and used them as diapers. He would take the dirty diapers and clean those in the snow, when he brought them in; they were stiff like a board. My sister was always crying, she was either sick or hungry. One day, I saw my mother sitting in a chair, with one elbow leaning on the table next to the chair holding her head. Her eyes were closed, tears coming down. I knew that something bad happened, that winter in Bialystok, my sister Sarah Leah died. My parents told me years later that she died from pneumonia. There was no medicine and there wasn't anything that they could do for her.

Now that Sarah Leah died, there were three of us left, my brother Moishe, Aaron Luzer and myself.

Before the war broke out, I was a happy little girl, playing outside the house with my siblings. My name in Yiddish is Rivka Rochel; I was named after my father's mother and my mother's mother. We lived outside the city, there was hardly any traffic, very few people walking by and we hardly saw any "droshkies," which are horses and buggies. The street was not paved, and there were no cobble stones either. It was just a dirt road, the houses were set apart, a little secluded. We ran around, playing games, the usual things that children do. My mother kept an eye on us through the window in the kitchen, which faced the front yard, where we played. She did her cooking and cleaning and lots of laundry, with four children, she was very busy.

My grandfather, Zeide Yankel lived with us; he was my mother's father. I recall sitting on his lap, while he was teaching me the Hebrew blessings. One was the blessing for the Shabbat candles. He was short and thin and he had a white beard. His name was Yankel Novominsky. He was in very good shape, and my mother was always telling us that people would comment about his youthful appearance. My grandmother died before I was born, so I never met her. My father's father, Zeide Welvel, died before I was born as well. My son Warren was named after Yankel and Welvel. In those days, parents lived with their children. My Zeide was 72 when the war broke out.

While my mother was busy in the house, taking care of the whole family, my father went to work. He worked for his brother Gedale, who owned a flourmill. He would buy flour from his brother and resell it to the bakeries in the neighborhood. The majority of the bakeries were owned by Polish people, one of his favorite customers was Panie Dudek. He always spoke fondly of him. My father would deliver the flour and Dudek would pay him in zlotys. Sometimes my mother would go to collect the money that was owed while my father was busy with deliveries. She usually went early in the morning while we were still asleep.



My mother's Yiddish name was Cywia. I found out recently that her first name was Bracha, and Cywia was her middle name. I took a trip to Poland in August of 2011, with my son Warren, daughter Michelle and my brother Moishe. We went to Warsaw and from there a guide took us by car to Wyszkwow, which is only about an hour from Warsaw. Our guide went to the building where they kept all the birth and marriage certificates and he found the birth certificates of my brothers Moishe, Aaron Luzer, and the certificate of marriage of my parents. My birth certificate they couldn't find; everything was destroyed after 1934. I was born after 1934, we think it was the following year, 1935. I was almost 4 years old when the war broke out in September of 1939. Therefore, my birthday has to be October 1935. She told me that I was born before the Jewish Holiday, Succoth, which is in October. Our town Wyszkwow was bombed and completely demolished during the war. We couldn't find the house where we lived and the streets were renamed. Wyszkwow is a brand new town, the names of the streets didn't sound familiar. Our guide pointed out one wall that remained standing from before the war. We walked through the town and couldn't find anything familiar.

Mother was a very good cook and baker. Those days everybody cooked and baked. People didn't go out to eat in restaurants; they barely had enough money to buy food, only the lucky ones and those that had jobs had enough to eat. They were considered rich. My favorite baked food was called "Jagejankes", they were turnovers filled with blueberries. When we were in Warsaw, on our recent trip, my son Warren's friends took us to a lovely Polish restaurant. We had a very nice meal and when we were almost finished eating, the waiter overheard us talking about jagejankes, and after dinner, he brought us out a tray of delicious jakejankes. They were a little different than the way we made them. You couldn't see the blueberries from the outside. I should have asked him for the recipe. They are especially good, right out of the oven, while they are still warm. When I saw my mother preparing the Jagejankes, I would hang around the kitchen, staying close to the oven, and as soon as they came out, we would each get a Jagejanke. I took the Jagejanke split it in half and picked out the blueberries from inside. It was a delicious treat. I didn't realize how time consuming it is to make them. I tried it many times, and I could not master the technique of baking. My mother did most of the cooking and baking at night, while we were asleep. It was quiet in the house and with no distractions from us kids; she was able to accomplish most of her chores. During the day, she was busy with us, and there were always people coming in, mostly family, asking for a donation, especially on Friday. They didn't have anything at home to prepare for the Shabbat dinner, and we had flour. They would walk in and stand by the door; my mother knew what they wanted. She would ask, "Do you need flour to prepare for the



Shabbat dinner" and the response was, "I could really use some." My mother was generous and gave them whatever she could spare.

On one occasion, while we were playing outside in front of the house, we spotted a Polish man coming towards our house. He was walking, and moving from one side of the street to the other, wobbling like he was drunk, she told us to quickly get into the house. She said -- "A shikere geit" in Yiddish, which means, "A drunkard is coming." "Ich darf farmachen alle luden," "I have to close all the blinds or shutters," she proceeded to close them and lock the doors. This man might have been harmless, and was maybe one of the good guys, and maybe we just rushed to judgment. Thinking everybody that was drunk was bad. We were always scared of what some of the Polish men would do when they were drunk, or sometimes they would do bad things while they were sober too. To play it safe, we would hide in the house, and lock all the doors, windows and shutters. There was no one to protect us, our street was deserted, there were no telephones, and even if you called the Police, they came and when the argument was between a Pole and a Jew, the Jew was always the loser.

My parents, grandparents and great grand parents were all born in Poland, but were treated as second-class citizens. There were approximately 5,000 Jews in Wyszkiow before the war, and only one Jewish doctor in our town. Jews were not allowed to get a higher education, there was a quota. Those that could afford would send their children to another country to get an education. Very few were able to afford such a luxury. Therefore, the majority of Jews became shoemakers, tailors, butchers, and some went into business, like my father did. The women stayed home to raise the children. Most people had big families. My father had 13 siblings, some died at a young age, and maybe 9 survived.

Friday was a very busy day. My mother started to prepare for the Shabbat dinner the night before, she would bake her own Challah and I would watch how she twisted the dough and braided it. She also made a cholent, which is made with potatoes, meat and beans and has to stew overnight. She took it to a special bakery, where it cooked overnight and was ready for Shabbat. The next day, somebody would go to pick it up, and we would eat it for Shabbat lunch after the men came home from the synagogue.

That is how my parents met, they both went to pick up the cholent, they started to talk, and it was love at first sight, so they said.

My father was tall and good looking, with a fair complexion. He was not quite 6 feet tall, for a European man, he was considered very tall. Most European men were short, especially Jewish men. My mother on the other hand was short, with curly chestnut hair and an olive complexion.



According to the records that were found in Wyszkwow recently, my mother was 31 and my father were 27 when they got married. However, they didn't register their marriage with the authorities until three years later. So actually, she was 28 and my father was 24 years old at their wedding.

After walking for days we finally arrived at my uncle's house, my mother's brother, his name was Zurich. He had a big house and was very generous. He accommodated my mother, her family, another sister and brother and their families. We lived in that house with Uncle Zurich until the late fall. After a while by the beginning of November, when the weather changed and it got colder, my parents decided to leave Jadow. We took a train to Bialystok. There were many Jews in Bialystok that ran away as the Germans were approaching. My father's sisters, Malka, Chana, Tzirl and his brother Gedale and his family were there as well.

We were told by the local government that if we would like to become citizens of Bialystok, and the surrounding areas, like Jadow and Slonim, which were now under the Russian occupation, we could settle and live there in any of these towns that we choose. That is what my mother's brothers decided to do. Since my Uncle Zurich had a big house in Jadow, he decided to remain in his house and so did my mother's brother Simcha. My Uncle Zurich said that he didn't want to leave his beautiful big house and go to Russia; he was comfortable here in his own home and didn't want to try the unknown.

My parents, on the other hand decided against the idea of becoming Russian citizens, and refused to take out the necessary papers for citizenship and therefore we were considered German spies. We learned later on that we made the right decision as far as becoming citizens, which is why we were deported to Siberia and saved from the oncoming German Army.

In 1941 when Germany declared war on Russia, they occupied all these towns, and the first thing they did when they entered the town, they started to kill the Jews, and those that weren't killed they either put them in a ghetto, like the Warsaw Ghetto, where my Aunt Mishke was sent or they were sent to different concentration camps. Their objective was to kill all the Jews of Europe.

My mother's brothers remained in their homes in Jadow and Slonim and did the required paper work for citizenship. When the Germans marched into town, they rounded up all the Jews and sent them to different concentration camps. My uncles and their families were sent away the same as everybody else. Exactly, how they died, we don't know, and all the other Jews that remained were concentrated in one place in Warsaw, Poland. It was called the Warsaw Ghetto. My mother thinks that her



sister, Mishke and her daughters died in Warsaw. Mishke's husband immigrated to Argentina before the war and promised to bring her and his daughters to Argentina as soon as he was able to do it. In the meantime, the war broke out and she was unable to leave and said that she would wait for the war to be over and then she will join her husband in Argentina. We don't know exactly how my mother's siblings perished, did they die in Warsaw Ghetto or they died in concentration camps

My mother used to tell me that the Germans were very nice during World War I, the Jews were not killed, and when the war was over, life returned to the way it was before the war. That is the reason why so many Jews decided to stay where they were born, they couldn't believe that anything bad will happen to them.

However, this war was different, nobody could imagine that it will turn out the way it did, and the Germans were not the same as the ones that entered our city during World War I.

My father's sisters Malka and Chana and his brother Gedale ran away as the German army was approaching. They went as far as they could go in Russia, where the Germans hadn't reached yet. Every time the German army marched forward into Russia, they met resistance from the Russians. If the Germans won the battle, then they rounded up all the Jews; either they were killed on the spot, or sent to concentration camps.

We kept in touch with my Aunt Malka via mail and we knew that she and her family were alive.

## **Chapter II**

### **Bialystok**

We were still in Bialystok during the early winter or late fall of 1940. My father was always on line for something, either bread or flour. He was always looking for food for his family. He came home exhausted every day. The lines were long and there were always fights because some people would cut in the line and there was pushing and shoving. One had to be very assertive and clever to make a living. Sometimes my Dad came home with no food, because by the time he got to the front, there was nothing left for him, the shelves were empty.

My mother rarely ventured out, she was too quiet and couldn't deal with the crowds. She was a homebody, and would rather just stay home and take care of the children as best she could. My dad was the adventurer, he



went out every day to see what's doing in town, to meet people and get ideas from them as to what to do, to size up the situation to find out what the other people are doing, where they are going and where to get the next meal.

One day, in the middle of the night, while we were still in Bialystok, Russian soldiers came into the house. They barged in and they told us to pack everything up, all our belongings, quickly. Don't waste any time, we have to leave as soon as possible. They didn't explain to us where we are going. Just hurry up. We are being shipped out. They told us to hurry up, pack what ever you can carry. They waited until we were finished packing, and we were on our way to Siberia. They were polite and friendly, and they seemed to have a sense of humor.

My mother did most of the packing while the soldiers were standing and watching us. She was holding a wooden rolling pin, and asked one of the soldiers if she could take it with us. He replied in Russian "fcho yesch" which means, we have everything, there is plenty of wood where you are going. The reason they took us away is because we were not citizens of that part of Poland. We were considered the enemy.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Siberia**

It was a very long journey; we took a train to Kotlas, and then a Parahod, which is a boat, across a big river, the Vychegda River, since at that time the train did not go all the way to that part of Siberia. The major city is called Syktyvkar; Komi SSR Oblast SSR is Soviet Soyuz Republic, which is a Soviet Union or a Republic. We were sent to a camp-like atmosphere, there were several barracks. We gave it a name, and called it the Mali Lodge. Mali means small in Russian and Lodge is the name of a town in Poland. So we named it Small Lodge. There were several families in each barrack.

We all shared the same kitchen, and everybody knew everybody's business. Some got up early to go to work, and others chose to sleep later. The women would often have arguments in the kitchen. There was one man that never wanted to get up in the morning, he preferred to sleep and he didn't want to go to work, like everybody else did. His name was Chaim Yalle, every morning his wife would yell, "Chaim Yalle, get up", you have to get up. "You will get arrested". Chaim Yalle was lazy, and we would hear them arguing all the time.



This was really togetherness, and every day, we heard these arguments. My mother kept to herself and tried as much as possible to avoid fights. She didn't like to tell people what to do, and she tried to avoid a confrontation.

My parents received 2 single beds, my mother and I slept in one bed, and my 2 brothers and father slept in another.

My father was offered a cow, he didn't know anything about raising a cow or milking it, but he accepted the cow. He figured if things don't work out, he would return it. The people in our barrack would make fun of us, they said Yizhok, which was my father's Yiddish name; "what are you crazy" "what do you know about a cow?" You never had a farm with animals; there is a lot of work involved. My Dad shrugged off their comments. He said; "what do I have to lose, if it doesn't work out, I will return the cow to the authorities".

However, it turned out that my parents made the right decision. We had milk and butter, we had what to eat, and we would exchange milk for bread, while most of the people were starving. If you had food, you were considered wealthy. Now everybody was jealous of us. There was hunger and starvation all around us; everyday we saw dead bodies.

I was 4 years old when we arrived in Siberia. My parents enrolled me in a Yassle, which is like a nursery school. I was accepted in school in exchange for milk and butter, and we were considered lucky those days.

One day my mother gave me a piece of dark bread with butter; on top of the butter she added "monchko" which is sugar in Yiddish. It was delicious; I haven't had such a treat in a long time. She told me "don't let anyone take it away from you". The kids would always grab things from me, they used to gang up on me, and so I had to give up what ever I had. This time I took the bread and ran away and hid under the bed and enjoyed that delicious piece of bread and butter. The little things that one remembers, but at that time, they were important, especially when you are hungry.

We had food, but didn't have any medicine, my brother Aaron Luzer, got sick. He was a sickly child from birth. He was always tired. He couldn't walk very far. After walking a short distance, he had to rest. We didn't know what the matter with him was. He wasn't diagnosed properly. In Siberia, there were no doctors in our immediate area, even if you found a doctor, he couldn't get the medicine. My brother, Aaron Luzer died that winter; he was only 7 years old. Now, there were just the two of us left, my brother Moishe and myself.



My father got sick too, he was in a coma for a long time, and he was hallucinating. My mother thought that this is the end. He didn't open his eyes, we couldn't get a doctor, and we didn't know what to do for him. He was just lying in bed, motionless. My mother would sit by his bed and cry, She would say, "what am I going to do without him, how am going to take care of two children by myself." She would sit by his bedside and watch him day after day, waiting for him to open his eyes.

In the meantime, Moishe and my mother went out to do the work that my father used to do. The snow was so high and on more than one occasion, my mother fell into the snow, because the snow was taller than she was. Moishe pulled her out every time.

We were surrounded by woods. In the winter, everything was white outside. When you went out, all you could see were miles and miles of snow and woods. Some people were brave and ventured out, but many never returned. It was almost impossible to find your way back if you went into the forest. To survive the outdoors in the winter, you had to put on a warm jacket, it was called a Kufaike. It was padded, it had a hood with fur, and you also needed high boots with fur inside to keep warm. The whole head was covered, only the eyes were visible. During the time my father was sick, my mother and Moishe went outdoors, to do some work, but they stayed close to the barracks, so as not to get lost.

One day, my father opened his eyes, whatever disease he had, seemed to have passed. We didn't know what disease he had, since he was never diagnosed. My mother started to feed him; we still had the cow, so there was milk and butter. He regained his strength, and little by little he got better. My father always said, no matter how sick you are, you should eat, and you will get well faster. After staying in bed, for what seemed to be an eternity, he got up and went back to work. He worked very hard, cutting down the trees, only the strongest and healthiest survived. The work was very hard, you had to be outdoors from morning until night, chopping the trees, and there were plenty of them. All one could see were trees and the sky and nothing else.

I hardly went out in the winter; the Yassle that I went to was indoors, I was too young to go anywhere, and besides, it was much too cold for the little kids.

Finally, summer came, and it was hot. There were so many huge mosquitoes there, biting day and night. My parents put a net around my bed, so I could sleep at night. I still have mosquito bites left on my legs. You couldn't go outside because of the mosquitoes, and you couldn't stay inside either, it was a no win situation. When we did venture out, we had to cover ourselves, to prevent the mosquitoes from getting to us.



There were lots of blueberries in the woods; we went out with buckets to collect them, which was the most fun I ever had. I hopped from one bush to the next and stayed close to the barracks. While I was picking, I was eating.

After a while I had a huge amount of blueberries. My mother didn't bake her famous Jagejankes those days- she didn't have any flour. We brought them back into the barracks, and we snacked on them. They were delicious; of course everything tastes good when you are hungry.

## **Chapter IV**

### Kazakhstan

We met the natives of Siberia, they were Komi people, and they looked Asian with small slanted eyes and short, like the Eskimos. They spoke their own language. It was not a dialect of Russian; it was a language of the Komi people that live in that part of Siberia. At first we used our hands to communicate with them. After a while, we learned a few words in their language, just barely enough to get by. Since I went to the Yassle I learned to speak Komish. Only the nachalnik (an official) spoke Russian.

After living in Siberia for about a year and half, we were told that we are free to leave because they said we were no longer considered enemies of Russia. We can choose to go anywhere we like. The majority of people went to Central Asia, the weather was warm and it was far from the war, which was still going on.

We packed up the few possessions that we accumulated, which wasn't much, and gave back the cow to the local government. My father got attached to the cow, it helped to sustain us in these tough times, provided us with milk and butter that we were able to exchange for bread. But everybody left, and the weather was very harsh, so we decided to leave as well.

The journey leaving Siberia was similar to the way we arrived. We took a Parahod, which is a boat, to Kotlas, the nearest major city to Syktyvkar. In Kotlas, there were trains to different cities in Russia, and from there we picked up a train to Asia. Those days, there was no train schedule as to when the train was going to leave, not even what day or week.

We came to the train station with all our belongings, sat down near the train tracks, with lots of other people, and waited. It could take a day or a week. Also, the war was still going on and they needed the train to transport soldiers to the war zone, and we were just refugees and not a



priority at the time, there were more important issues the government had to deal with those days.

After days of waiting and always looking for food, and at night sleeping on the platform near the train tracks, the train finally arrived. My mother was nervous when my father left the train station. He would wonder off to look for food and check out the neighborhood, talk to people. He was always restless. She used to say to him, "Don't go too far you will miss the train".

The train was long with many cattle cars. Several families were assigned to each cattle car. There was straw in the corner of the train on the floor, and we slept on the straw. Our family stayed together in one corner of the car. We were on that train for many weeks. It seemed like we would live like that for the rest of our lives. Every few hours, the trains stopped. My father, along with all other eligible workers, would cut down trees that were needed to fuel the locomotive. During the time when we stopped, we would be outside trying to get air and try to get some food from the neighboring towns. We would ask people for food and water. Some people on the trains had jewelry or valuables, like clothing and materials, and they would barter for food. Our family didn't have anything. It was difficult, and we didn't have any opportunity to bath during the entire time.

During the day, the train made many stops along the way. Every time, we arrived in a new town or city, the train would make a stop. Everybody got off, to get some food and water, several times during our journey, the train stopped for a long period of time. On those occasions, my father had to find wood and chop it while my mother made a fire and cooked whatever she could find that day. It seemed like we would never arrive at our destination. The distance between Siberia and Central Asia is huge, and it takes many days and weeks of traveling to get to that part of Asia.

One day when the train stopped, my father got off as usual. He went into town to get some food for his family and didn't return. In the meantime, the train left without him.

My mother was frantic, she said, "What are we going to do how is he going to find us." She was crying and carrying on. "What are we going to do without him, how are we going to survive?" After a few days or perhaps weeks went by, when the train made another stop, my father showed up. We didn't have a radio, calendar or clock. Nobody knew what day or time it was. He waited for the next train, however long it took, and he caught up with us. He was looking for food to help take care of us, and in those days he didn't have a watch and lost track of time and came back and the train left without him. Everyone got off the train when it stopped, so that wasn't unusual, but the fact that he didn't come back made my mother very nervous, understandably. It was not easy, he had to make sure to catch the



right train, going the same direction that we were going, which was, Central Asia, but he somehow managed to find us.

My father had a habit of wandering off, he couldn't sit still too long in one place, sometimes he did it because he had to, and other times he did it out of curiosity. We were so glad to see him, alive and well. He brought us all kinds of goodies to eat. After that episode, my mother was watching him, to make sure that he doesn't wonder off again and she made sure that he stays close to the train station.

The weather was good, it was early summer or late spring, we didn't need heavy clothing, and there was no need to bundle up when we stepped down from the train. I don't know exactly how long of a journey this was. It may have taken us months to arrive at our destination.

Finally, after the longest journey that my family ever took we arrived in Turkistan, Kazakhstan. We spent two to three months on the train--all day and night, with stops during the day to refuel. They had to chop the wood, so it would be for a few hours at a time.

The, natives of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which it borders, are Muslim. They circumcise the boys, like the Jews do, but they do it when the boys are much older unlike the Jews who circumcise the baby boys when the baby is 8 days old.

## **Chapter 5**

Turkistan, 1942

When we first arrived, the locals were very friendly and hospitable; they invited us to their home, to share a meal with them. The home was decorated with colorful carpets, on the floor and the wall. The whole family would sit on the floor, in a circle, and eat their meals. They used their hands and fingers to eat. I didn't see any silverware. We were very glad that they invited us, since we were so hungry, and we ate with them whatever they offered us. . A popular dish that they served was called Lapsh, which are wide noodles. They were delicious. Of course, everything tastes good when you are hungry. They also baked their own bread looked like pita bread. It was called lipyoshke. They made it by hand, the dough looks like pizza dough, it was flattened and made round and then it was thrown against the inside of a very hot round oven. They did it so fast that the dough never fell down, and when it was baked they removed the bread from the round oven and it was ready to be eaten. I would stand there and watch them bake the lipyoshke. As a little girl, I was fascinated with their skill of baking these lipyoshkes. I waited until they finished, and I would



stand there until they gave me a piece of lipyoshke. I was a little girl and was hungry, so they just felt sorry for me.

The natives didn't speak Russian; they spoke their own language, and didn't much care for the Russians or the government. We learned a few words in order to be able to communicate with the locals. After a while, the local population was not that friendly, they didn't want to share their food with us any longer. When we approached their homes, they would say "yok yok", which means go away. Times were hard, they didn't have that much food themselves those days, and they resented us for intruding on their lifestyle.

One day there was excitement in town one of our neighbor's sons was being circumcised, and there was a big celebration afterwards. My favorite food was served, lapsha and lipyoshke, and I would help myself to the food. I didn't know that you had to be invited. I was hungry and I saw food and just took some. It was delicious. I was little and got lost in the crowd.

The years between 1942 and 1943 were the hardest. I heard the adults talking that the Germans were advancing, and the locals, the Kazakhs and Uzbeks were cheering, because they didn't care much for the Russian Government. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were under the Russian control, at that time. The NKVD, which is the Russian secret police found out about these local agitators, and during the night they were all arrested and sent away, either to Siberia or to jail. The next morning, when we got up, it was quiet and there was no more trouble in town. The Kazakhs were drafted into the army, but most ran away, and didn't want to serve in the Russian army.

When I was six years old, my parents sent me to a camp. The camp was in Turkistan, Kazakhstan. Many of the children in camp were orphans. I was not an orphan, but my parents couldn't feed me and take care of me. My head was completely shaved. I looked like a boy. The reason my head was shaved, was due to lice. Everybody had lice those days. I was in that camp for a short time, and then I was sent home. The camp closed down, the local government in Turkistan, didn't have the funds to run the camp. There were many children in that camp, boys and girls and everybody was in a similar situation.

We were very poor when we lived in Turkistan; we had absolutely nothing to eat. One day, I saw a small child that died. My mother helped to prepare the little body for burial. They washed the body and wrapped it in a white shroud and placed it in the ground. People were dying everyday in front of our eyes. They died of disease and hunger, even at that time during the war; there were some people that were better off than others. People that had a skill or a trade managed to eat and were considered rich.



We shared a hut with another family, as most people did at that time. It had a dirt floor. We had one corner and the other family had the other corner. Our cousins from Wyszkw, coincidentally, happen to live in the same town with us in Turkistan, they were the Dybners, same as our last name. Joseph Leib was my father's first cousin. They were better off than us, he had a trade, he was a shoe maker, which happen to be a good business during the war.. He made boots and shoes, and got paid with food, because you couldn't buy anything with money during the years of 1942 and 1943. My father didn't have any skills and, therefore, couldn't make a living.

One day, my Dad said to my mother, you know what, I will pay a visit to my cousin Joseph Leib Dybner; he was my father's first cousin. He said to my mother, maybe he can help us out. He took me with him; we looked like beggars, which we were actually.

My Dad knocked on the door and asked Joseph's wife - her name was Sarah, if she could give us the water from the noodles after they are cooked. He didn't have the nerve to ask for the noodles, he figured he will just ask for the water from the noodles and maybe a couple of noodles would fall into the water that would be better than nothing. She gave us some soup and she told us we could sleep on the floor, if we wanted to stay over. She gave us a blanket and my father and I slept on the bare floor.

My parents didn't send us to school. They were concentrating on feeding us, and school was not mandatory those days.

In the winter, we lived in Turkistan, and in the summers, we would go to a village, to a Kolhoz, a collective farm. The name of the Kolhoz was Andreof. During the summer months, it was easier to find work in the village. My father was assigned the job of cutting the wheat. I went to work with him; at the end of the day, he used to give me some wheat to take home. I put the wheat in my baggy pants, I was a little girl and nobody checked me, they wouldn't check a little girl, and what would the authorities do to me, they didn't put children in jail, I was only six years old. I thought it was a game; I was hungry and did things that under normal circumstances children wouldn't do. Therefore, the situation was better for us in the summer. There was also fresh fruit available, my mother used to cut up the honeydew into long narrow pieces and let them dry in the sun, after they were dried, she gave me the dried pieces of honeydews and I would chew on them. It tasted so good. We managed to eat them up in no time. The purpose of drying the fruit was so we could have something to eat in the winter when honeydews and melons were not in season, but we ate everything up way before the winter season arrived.



We lived in a hut in the village, with a mud floor. Even under those difficult circumstances, my mother tried to keep the place neat. She found some plates, made of clay and would display them on a mud shelf on the wall. There was never any food to eat, and I would wander outside, looking for somebody to give me something to eat. I had no toys and nothing to do, and I had rags for clothing and I was barefoot.

There was a cat in our immediate neighborhood, how the cat survived I don't know, it was so skinny. I played with that cat all day long. There was nothing else to do. I had no friends, so the cat was my pal. Because Moishe was a boy and four years older, my parents always had chores for him. They asked him to go look for food, so I was left alone and roamed around, looking for something or someone to play with and there was the cat. I didn't have any friends. I used to pick up the cat, throw it in the air, and try to catch it. There was a dry well, maybe there was water at one time, but during that summer it was completely dry. The well was not very deep, that is what I did with the cat: I threw the cat into that dry shallow well and watch as it climbed up. That is how I amused myself. I didn't go to school, there were no books to read, we didn't have a radio, and we didn't know what was going on in the world. I am surprised that cat didn't bite me. I was probably mean to that cat, and nobody said anything to me. Then one day, the cat disappeared. There were no dogs or cats. Somebody said that they were killed and eaten. I had no supervision; my parents were too busy trying to figure out how to make a living, which consumed all their time. They were always looking for new ways to bring home food. They were willing to do anything.

Then the winter came, and we went back to Turkistan, we knew that it's not going to be much better in the city, but we had no choice, there was absolutely nothing to do in the village during the winter. There was no wheat to cut, and there was no work or food.

We did receive a ration of bread while we were living in Turkistan. When my father went to pick up the bread, by the time he came home, it was eaten up. However, when my mother went to pick up the bread, my brother Moishe and I would sit on the window sill and watch her walk home. She used to wrap a shawl around the bread, made sure it was all covered up, because people would grab it from you if it was uncovered. We were so excited when we saw her walking with the bread-- we would yell and scream, goody, here it comes. We knew that our mother would not eat before we had a chance to eat and made sure that we had it first. On certain holidays, we received white bread; that was a special treat. Then there was no bread at all. Those years were very difficult, the years of 1942 and 43, you couldn't buy any bread, even if you had money.



My brother and I would go to the train station and wait for the Russian soldiers that came back from the war; some were on crutches, with one leg and some with no legs at all. Their heads were bandaged. It was an awful sight. The soldiers were the only people that seemed to have what to eat. They were sent to fight a very sophisticated German Army and the majority of the soldiers did not return, and those that did come back were wounded, mentally and physically. Therefore, the government made sure that they would be fed. The soldiers saw us -- two little children, dressed in rags and obviously hungry, standing and begging for food. They had pity on us and gave us whatever they could spare. All we wanted was a piece of bread. I don't remember whether we ate everything up or we brought some home to our parents. This is how we survived those terrible years of 1942 and 1943.

After living in the city for a while, we decided to return to the Kolhoz to try our luck there again. The situation there was just as bad. My mother would go outdoors to collect certain leaves that were edible. She chopped up the leaves, very fine and made pancakes and fried them. This is what we ate. People were dying every day, mostly from hunger and disease. I never saw any old people. They were all gone. One had to be young, strong, and lucky to survive.

We lived in a hut with another family and this young couple had a small child, a little boy, he was maybe a year old. Every other day, that little boy stopped breathing; he was blue in the face. His mother turned him upside down, smacked him on the behind, and after a while he started to breathe again and began to cry. He was so skinny, you could count all his ribs, and when he was turned upside down with his head facing the floor, he looked like a dried up chicken.

This little boy was hungry the same as us, and when my mother made the pancakes from the grass, we shared it with the other family. That little boy was always crying, he was either hungry or sick and obviously in a great deal of pain. We didn't know what happened to that family, because again, we decided to go back to the city. The weather was getting colder, and we thought that we would try our luck in the city.

When we moved back to the city, we shared an apartment with several other families. I didn't know these people. They were not family. My father asked them if we could stay with them for a while until we could find our own place. One day, my parents and my brother Moishe went away for the day. They might have been looking for work. I was left alone in the house. I was hungry and I saw that our neighbor had bread in their little cubicle. I was so hungry; I paced the floor, every time I went back to look at that bread. It was so tempting. I finally made a decision: I will take a piece of bread and eat it. I knew it wasn't ours, but I couldn't help it. I took one



piece of bread and then I went back and took a second piece. I couldn't stay in the house an entire day without eating if there was bread there. My parents didn't leave me anything to eat and didn't leave any instructions as to what to do. They left me alone for the whole day and I was very hungry.

At the end of the day, when these neighbors returned from work they had a fight with my parents, there was yelling and screaming. They accused my parents of teaching me to steal and I was accused of stealing their prized possession, which was bread at the time.

I ran away and went hiding under the bed; my parents didn't do anything to me. They knew that I was hungry, the bread was already in my stomach, the damage was done and there wasn't anything that anybody could do at this time. From time to time, I came down with stomach pain, the pain was excruciating, my mother didn't know what to do, and she put hot compresses on my stomach. We couldn't afford a doctor, we didn't have anything to pay the doctor with, and we didn't know any in town. My mother kept putting hot compresses on my stomach, and eventually the pain subsided.

Several women that we knew went into business; they baked small sponge cakes, they were called Ponchkes, soft and fluffy, they looked like doughnuts. After they were baked, the women would take them to a Bazaar, which is like a flea market, and sell their wares. A lot of it was stolen, because nobody had any money and everybody was hungry. As the women carried the sponge cakes to the Bazaar, people ran right up to them, grabbed one or two and ran away. Whatever was left was sold right away, to those that could afford to buy them.

My mother couldn't do any thing like that; she didn't have flour or any ingredients that went into baking. Neither my father nor my mother had any skills for making a living those days. They were always bickering and fighting. When there is no food and there is nothing to eat and people are starving, love goes right out the window.

Finally, my parents came to the conclusion; some body in the family had to learn a skill. I was too young, and my brother Moishe was almost 13. My father went to see Itche Schisster, Itche was his first name and shisster, means a shoemaker. My father asked Itche Shister if he would be willing to teach my brother, Moishe, the shoe business. Thus my brother went to work for him, as an apprentice.

The shoemakers did very well during the war; they made shoes and boots for the soldiers and private people that could afford to pay. Moishe worked there for a while and was paid with food, bread and some produce. Itche was a good-natured man and very gentle. If somebody was in need, either



food or lodging, he was there to help. He had two lovely daughters; they were either in the late teens or early twenties.

A cousin of ours, Mime (aunt) Chana's son, Mendel, came to visit, from another city in Kazakhstan, Jambul. He didn't have where to stay, so he went to Itche Schisster, and he was welcome there. He fell in love with one of Itche's daughters, and they got married.

Even though there was a war going, times were bad, people were starving and dying from hunger and disease, yet there were those that were still willing to marry and lead a normal life under abnormal circumstances.

One day, there was excitement in town, people were yelling and screaming and hugging each other. We ran out of our little hut, to see what the noise was all about. The war is over, the war is over, and they were yelling and crying for joy.

It was wonderful news, the best news we have heard in a long time. After the war was over, our living conditions seemed to improve dramatically. My parents were invited to the wedding of Itche Shisster's daughter, the man my brother worked for. It was the first wedding that they were ever invited in Turkistan, and the first one that my parents decided to attend. My mother went out and bought herself an outfit, the first thing she ever bought since we arrived in Asia. We were consumed with food, where to get the next piece of bread, who thought about clothing. When you are hungry, all you can think about is food and where to get the next meal.

## Chapter 6

Poland 1945

Soon after the war ended, my parents decided that Russia was not for us, and we were not Russian citizens, therefore, we could immigrate to Poland, the country of our birth. We took a train back to Poland. However, we didn't go to Wyszki, we went to Walbzych, which was called Waldenburg before the war. It was part of Germany before the Second World War and then when Germany lost the war; it became part of Poland again. When we arrived back in Poland, we were told what happened to the Jews during the war. When we lived in Kazakhstan, we were isolated from the rest of the world. We didn't have a radio or newspaper, and as a result we didn't know what happened to all those people that were left in Poland. I heard my parent's talk of the horror stories, of the concentration camps. There was talk of lampshades made of human skin and human soap. Every time I looked at a piece of soap, I was afraid to use it. We lived there for a while



and then we moved to Klack, a city where many Germans lived before the war. We heard that our city, Wyszkow was completely destroyed, so we couldn't go back there. No matter where we went, we didn't feel at home. We were in a dilemma as to where or which country would have us. It was a very difficult time in Poland right after the war. Many of the cities were completely destroyed, the houses were demolished and it seemed that we were not welcome. Being Jewish, we felt especially unwelcome as many of the Polish people those days were anti-Semitic.

Many of the houses in Klack were abandoned, the inhabitants ran away as the Russians were approaching, and they left everything behind. All of their possessions, furniture, dishes, bedding, and the cellars were stacked with food, potatoes, cheeses, and all sorts of goodies. We haven't seen such wealth in a long time. My cousin Mendel found all these houses and told us that we could take whatever we wanted, since they were deserted. There was complete chaos and lawlessness.

For the first time in my life I went to school. My parents enrolled me in a Yiddish school. We spoke Yiddish at home, but I learned how to read and write. We lived in Klack for about 9 months.

Next door to our apartment lived several other Jewish families that also survived the war. I was friendly with one young couple; they had a little girl, named Sarah. I loved babysitting for Sarah, playing with her. She was clean and well fed, unlike Turkistan, where everyone that I met was starving, sick, dirty, and had old rags on.

My mother took me shopping one day, to a Bazaar. There were all kinds of things to buy, food and clothing and odds and ends. I saw this beautiful dress. It was gray. I fell in love with the dress; I carried on until my mother bought it for me. I don't know where she got the money to buy the dress. It was the first piece of clothing that she ever bought me that was new, since the war started. When we lived in Asia, I didn't care about clothing, all I wanted was a piece of bread to eat; I wore rags, and I was barefoot, in the winter she would wrap my feet with whatever she could find, because I didn't own a pair of shoes.

## **Chapter 7**

Salzburg, 1947

We decided that Poland was not for us. The Polish people were not friendly to us at the time, it was right after the war, and we had no family left. My mother found out that her sister Mishke and her family perished in



Warsaw ghetto. She didn't know what happened to her brothers, how they died. Our Jewish neighbors were leaving, so we decided to join them, and left as well. We left Poland at night while it was dark. We didn't want the locals to see what we were up to- we were afraid to be attacked. There were rumors that some Jewish survivors came back after the war and they were killed by the local Poles.

We took a train at night, together with our Jewish neighbors, we passed Czechoslovakia, arrived in Vienna, and from Vienna we took another train to Salzburg, Austria. The Americans were in Austria as well as Germany. Before the war, Hitler annexed Austria, which was now part of Germany. After the war, Germany was divided between the United States and Russia and the Americans came into Austria. When we arrived in Salzburg, we were taken to a Displaced Persons Camp. The camp was located right outside of town, in an area called Maxglan.

The name of the camp was called Beit Bialik; the camp consisted of maybe 20 long barracks. There were many families in each barrack and each person received his own bed. Families with children were given bunk beds as well as single beds. I slept on the top bed and my brother on the bottom.

There was no kitchen or bathroom in the barracks, but we were provided with food. I heard people talking about grapes; in Yiddish it is called Wantrobben. I had never seen grapes before or oranges. One kid showed me a banana. I was told that you can peel the skin off and eat it. These fruits were not available in camp, but people that had money could go to town and buy them. Spam was one of the foods that we received in camp and once a week, chocolate was distributed. You had to be of a certain age; usually the young children were eligible.

I was lucky to get a bar of chocolate once a week, I had never seen chocolate before, and we were counting the days for the next bar of chocolate. We knew already what day to line up. My brother wasn't eligible for the chocolate bars, he was too old. He never asked me for any and I didn't share with him. For me, as a little girl, it was the exciting day of the week to get my chocolate bar!

Only the little children qualified for these goodies, I was lucky in that respect, since I was usually the right age. Nobody had any birth certificates, and we didn't know how old any body was. We also had a doctor on the premises; his name was Dr. Bonom. My mother called him every time I got sick. He was one of the first people to immigrate to the United States, and he lived in Queens, New York.



We were provided with assistance from a Jewish Organization – called The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. They provided us with food and clothing, and assisted us in the immigration process.

During the summer, I was sent to a camp for two weeks. The young and sickly children were sent there, it was paid for by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. It was a beautiful camp, high up in the Austrian Mountains. My parents would come to visit me, and they always complained how high they had to climb the mountain to get to that camp. I loved being there, the food was good, the air was fresh and I was with other children in similar circumstances, and I regained my strength.

Every morning, before breakfast, we had to line up and exercise, and then we went into a dining room and had breakfast. In the afternoon, we went for long walks, exploring the surrounding area. Before the war this camp was a resort with a small hotel. There were several buildings; the main building had a dining room, a kitchen and several bedrooms where the staff slept. Then there were small cottages where the campers stayed. There were swings and a playground on the premises of the camp, I loved going on the swings, and it was exciting to see how high I could swing. I never saw a swing before; this was my first experience of being in a resort atmosphere. I enjoyed the camp life and I had enough to eat and I liked being with other children my age. We were kept busy all day long.

My brother, Moishe, didn't go to camp, there was a cut off age for eligibility and he was not the right age. He stayed home and helped out my parents, and he was there for them when they needed him.

There was an organization in camp called Betar. I joined that organization; it was a lot of fun and very interesting. I loved being a member of Betar; we were taught the history of Israel, the names of all the cities, and the names of the Kibutzim. Betar is a Zionist organization, and they believe all of Israel belongs to the Jews. We were given uniforms, navy blue skirts and white shirts. On certain Holidays, we marched up and down the streets of the camp, waving the Israeli Flag and singing Hebrew songs. I liked it so much, I didn't want to come home; I stayed in the barrack where the camp was and had all my meals there.

I learned all the cities and villages, and about the men and women that were protecting them. We also learned all about the kibbutz life, many people preferred that type of life style. It was a communal life, everything was done for you, you had a room all your meals, and you were assigned a certain job. They showed us pictures how much fun it could be. I was begging my parents to move to Israel and to live in a Kibbutz. It sounded like a good place for us. We were told that you worked a whole day and at



night you partied, there was singing and dancing, there were many young people, boys and girls my age and older.

The Israeli Government sent a Hebrew teacher to our camp, her name was Mora Rachel, and she taught us the Hebrew Language and the living conditions in Israel. To master the language, we were told to speak only Hebrew among ourselves; this would benefit us when we arrive in Israel. It was assumed that everybody was moving to that country.

My mother was not happy with me living away from home, even though it was the same camp, but I didn't sleep at home. She persuaded me to come back and stay with the rest of the family. After a year or so of living in that particular barrack, we moved to another barrack, which was located closer to the entrance of the camp. It was the first barrack as you entered Camp Beit Bialyk.

Each family got their own private room, and I had my own bed. The rooms were not equipped with bathrooms or showers. To take a shower, we used to go into town, to a bathhouse. The bathhouse was located in the same area where the camp was. You had to pay a small fee to take a shower. Friday was my day to go to the bathhouse. I didn't see any bathtubs. There were many native Austrians that also came to take showers at the bathhouse, and we met the same people every Friday. There were women's showers and men's showers.

In our new barrack, we met several new families with small children. I met a young woman, although at the time, she seemed old to me. She was about 25 years old, she was not even Jewish, she was Polish; her husband was Jewish and they had a six year old boy. They had the first room as you entered the barrack, and I also used to meet her at the bathhouse on Fridays. Sometimes, we would go together for the showers. This young woman's husband was always away someplace, and she used to complain to my mother that he might be unfaithful. The advice my mother gave her was, just be patient, he will come back. Soon after that, they received their immigration papers and moved to America.

My cousin Motel came to visit us, he is the son of my aunt Malka, and they also lived in a Displaced Persons Camp in another city in Austria. The name of the city where my aunt and her family lived was called Linz. He took a picture of me in Beit Bialik; I am standing near a small bush next to our barrack. This is the first picture that anybody took of me since the war started and since we left Wyszkiw, Poland. I was maybe 10 years old at the time this picture was taken. The next picture that was taken of our family was in my aunt Malka's house in Linz, Austria. We celebrated Passover together.



Some people in camp decided to open up a school for the children, we were taught Hebrew and English. We were also taught music, there was a music teacher, he put together a choir, and we received uniforms, navy blue skirts and white shirts that we had to wear when we were in the choir. I have a picture of myself with the class. I cannot sing and as a result didn't do well in that class, and didn't like going to music classes. One day the teacher asked me to sing, well I cannot carry a tune, he told me to leave. I was so embarrassed that the next day, I quit music.

We had regular classes where we were taught English and math. I had to start from the beginning, to learn the English alphabet and some simple math. The classes were made up of children of all age groups. Mora Rachel that came from Israel taught Hebrew and we also had an English teacher. I liked Hebrew and English and enjoyed going to those classes

In the English classes, we had to learn reading, spelling and writing. I had to memorize some poems and had to stand in front of the class and recite the poem. At first it was too difficult, and I was shy, but then I made up my mind if anyone can do it, I can do it too, and stood up in front of the class and recited the poem in its entirety, and I enjoyed that experience.

When we were in camp Beit Bialik, I often got sick with my stomach, to this day, I have stomach problems. As usual, my mother called Dr. Bonom and he gave me a needle to kill the pain, and I felt better right away. One day, I got so sick that my parents rushed me to the Hospital in Salzburg.

The doctors in the Hospital decided that I had an appendix attack, and they immediately operated on me - they took out my appendix. They put ether on my nose, I had to count until 10, and I was out. After a couple of weeks in the Hospital, I was sent home, to recuperate. The following month, I was sick again, so the surgery didn't help.

Many of the children in camp had bicycles. I had one too. I loved riding mine, I would ride it only inside the camp; it was too dangerous for me to go outside of the familiar surroundings of our camp.

While living in camp, we became friends with another family, their name was Weingarten, and they had two children, a boy and a girl. I was friends with the girl, she used to ride with her Dad on a bicycle with a passenger seat, a by wagon. She and her father would ride into town and ride inside the camp, and we thought that they were showing off. We were all envious, because we haven't seen such beautiful bikes.

One day, there was excitement in camp. People were singing and dancing and cheering, the year was 1948, and it was May. There was such excitement; people were celebrating all night long, into the morning. The



reason for this celebration was that Israel became a nation after 2000 years. Before Israel became a country Jews weren't allowed to move there. The British occupied Israel, and if a ship would approach, it was intercepted, and the refugees were sent to Cypress.

My cousin Esther, who is my aunt Malka's daughter, came to visit us in 1947, before Israel became a nation. She and her husband Lovo, and they had a little girl; her name was Sarah, who was three years old, at the time. We were still living in Beit Bialik; they stayed with us for a short time before their departure to Palestine. It was a difficult and dangerous journey, because the British would arrest them if they were caught. They had help from some Jewish organizations in Palestine, and the trip was a success. They settled in Haifa. My cousin Esther still lives in Haifa, Israel, her husband died and she is a grandmother and great grandmother.

After Israel became a nation, our camp started to empty out. A lot of people moved to Israel, and the rest moved to Canada, the United States and different countries in South America. My cousins whose name also happens to be Moishe, moved to Costa Rica and the other cousins, Motel and Yosel moved to Argentina. They are my uncle's sons, my father's brother, Gdale. The Jews in camp applied to different countries, especially America, but whichever country accepted them, that is where they moved. My parents applied for visas to immigrate to America. I was crying... I didn't want to move to America, I only wanted to go to Israel. It just seemed like a fun place to be at the time. However, the year was 1948, and there was a war going on between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Right after Israel became a Nation, they were attacked.

My mother didn't want to move to Israel, she told my father that she had only one son left and didn't want him to go into the army. She lost two children during World War II, and she wanted to hold on to her remaining two children. By 1950, almost everybody moved, and there were very few people left in camp, and it didn't pay to keep the camp open for a handful of people and the decision was made to close it.

After the camp closed, my family and several other families moved to one barrack outside of camp Beit Bialik. We were all waiting for our papers to be processed to immigrate to the United States. In the meantime, my parents decided to send me to an Austrian school in Salzburg, not far from Beit Bialik, it was in the Maxglan area. I was the only Jewish girl in the school. I had a Polish accent, and I told the teacher that I came from Poland. I spoke German pretty well, by that time we had been living in Austria for a few years and young kids learn a language quicker than adults do. German is also similar to the Yiddish language and we spoke Yiddish at home; some of my friends in camp spoke Polish in the house, they came from Poland, like we did, but some families preferred Polish to



Yiddish, it was more patriotic for them. During the war, it was beneficial for many Jews who spoke a good Polish, they were able to pass as Poles and survive.

My teacher was a pretty young woman, and very pleasant. I was introduced to her by the principal of the school as a new student. The teacher asked me where I came from, and I told her that I was born in Poland. She told my classmates to be patient with me since I was a foreigner and had some catching up to do.

I did not tell anyone that I was Jewish, since nobody asked me, and I didn't have a need to disclose my religion. With my Polish accent, and my fair complexion and light hair, I could easily pass as a Pole.

It was interesting to go to a different school, to be with children of a different race and culture, and learn a new language. My classmates were friendly, and I mingled with the Austrian kids, as if I were one of them. I made new friends, and after school, we always walked home together. After one incident, things changed for me. One Friday afternoon, we walked out of school as usual, and I was walking home with one of my friends. She asked if she could walk home with me to see where I lived, and it happened to be on a Friday and my mother was lighting the Shabbat candles, which she has been doing since we were in camp. In Siberia or Central Asia, I don't ever remember her lighting the Shabbat candles; we didn't have any candles and maybe she didn't know when Friday was. My friend asked me what the candles are for, I told her that I was Jewish and we light candles on Friday evenings, which is the beginning of our Sabbath. After that episode things changed for me dramatically, this girl told everybody in school that I was Jewish, and the kids didn't want to be friends with me any longer. They would call me Jude, who means Jew, and I was picked on all the time. I came home from school, crying every day. I told my parents why I was so unhappy, but they knew, and couldn't help me. They told me that some people are bad and there are also some that are good. My mother always told me that if someone picks on you don't fight back, just ignore them. I don't think that I gave this advice to my children, but times were different then and we Jews didn't have much of a choice and my mother never liked to have a confrontation. She was resigned to the fact that everybody was against us, and some things cannot be changed. There were many Polish people that saved Jews during the war; they risked their own life and the lives of their families to help their Jewish friends and neighbors. Many Jews survived because of the kindness of these wonderful people.

There was one girl that was sympathetic to my situation, and she was my only friend in the entire school. She was a very pretty girl, with dark hair and an olive complexion. She didn't look typical Austrian; she looked more



like Italian or Jewish. One day, some boys were following us home from school, they were told that one of us was a Jew, but didn't know which one. They ran up to her and started calling her Jude, but left me alone. I was laughing inside because I was the Jew and she wasn't. How ironic.

In Salzburg in 1950, people didn't go to a department store to buy clothes that were ready made. You had to go to a fabric store, buy the fabric and then go to a dressmaker and she would show you a book with different designs and you picked what style you wanted to have made up. My mother and I went to fabric stores in Salzburg, and we told the sales girls what we were looking for. After looking through the shelves of the different color fabrics, we picked out a turquoise color fabric and a red and white polka dot fabric. That was the latest fashion of material at that time. Those days most Austrians did their own sewing at home, and the ones that could not sew, bought the fabric like we did and went to a dressmaker, who designed and sewed our clothes. The typical Austrian style of dress was called a dirndl. It has a square neck, pleated skirt with an apron and the sleeves are gathered and puffy with elastic. I picked out two styles from the fashion book, they were simple, the turquoise dress had a white trimming and the red and white polka dot, had ruffles on the bottom. I loved those dresses, it was the most beautiful dresses that I ever had and wore them to school to show my friends what beautiful clothes I had. My mother also took me to the fabric store to select material for a coat and beret to match. We picked out beautiful navy blue fabric for the coat and hat. I was hoping my classmates would be impressed with my new outfits and treat me nicer. I was the envy of the class; the Austrians in that neighborhood were not wealthy. It was right after the war, there were very few jobs and you had to be Austrian to get any kind of work. The foreigners were employed to do the work that the Austrians declined.

I was very uncomfortable in class during Weihnachten (Christmas). Everybody had to stand up and sing Christmas songs; I still recall one of the songs that we sang, and it was called Stille Nacht (Silent Night). Everybody got up to sing, I didn't want to be the only one sitting, so I got up too and participated with the class.

During the summer vacation, my mother didn't know what to do with me, and since the camp was closed, there were less children and little to do. They decided to send me to my Aunt Malka, who lived in Linz, Austria, in the displaced Persons Camp; she lived there with her husband Hill and her two sons, Motel and Hazkel. There was a granddaughter visiting my aunt, a little girl by the name of Esther. She was maybe six years old and my aunt had found her in an orphanage, and took her home. Nobody knew where Haitobe, my Aunt's daughter was, so in the meantime, little Esther lived with her grandmother, until her mother could be located.



I told my parents that I could take the train to Linz by myself, I knew the language and I will not get lost. On the way to Linz, however, I did get lost. The train that I boarded went to Vienna. I didn't realize my mistake right away, until the conductor announced that the next stop will be Vienna. I went over to the conductor explained my mistake, and he told me what to do, and where to get the next train bound for Linz. The German language was not a problem at the time; I spoke a good German for my age, and blended in with the locals.

I visited with my aunt and her family for about two weeks. It was Passover around that time and my parents and brother came for the Holiday, as shown on the picture that was taken at the time. My aunt Malka did some business with a local Russian man; he was always hanging around the barracks. One day he came over as usual, to talk to my aunt, he brought over a couple of bikes, one for me and one for little Esther. He offered me the bike and asked if I wanted to ride it. I said yes I would like to take the bike for a ride; after I began riding, the Russian man jumped behind me, and told me that he will take me for a ride. He left the camp, and I had a very uncomfortable feeling that he was going to do something bad to me. I started to yell and scream while we were riding through the town of Linz, and I was yelling on top of my lungs that I wanted to get off the bike, I said that I wanted to go home. He didn't let me; he told me in Russian *paigraishe*, which means we will play. I was screaming that I wanted to go home, people started to pay attention to us, they told him to let me go or they will call the police. He finally turned around and took me back to the camp. I was afraid to tell my aunt what happened, I sat in a corner and cried. After that episode, this Russian disappeared and I never saw him again.

I didn't tell my parents about this experience with this man. I thought my mother would yell at me, and scold me for getting on the bike in the first place. News travels fast; maybe somebody saw us and heard me crying, somebody probably reported what they saw to my Aunt Malka, and she got rid of him.

We spend the rest of the Holiday with my Aunt Malka and her family, and I went home with my parents and brother. My mother never let me go alone after that trip to Linz, and I was glad to be home, in my bed with familiar surroundings, with people I could trust.

I still had some friends left in camp, people like us that were waiting to immigrate to the United States or some other countries.

I continued going to school and made the best of the situation, by that time my teacher knew that I was Jewish, but she made no comment. She did



tell my classmates to leave me alone, to be kind, to take into consideration that I was not Austrian and came from a different background.

Some children took piano lessons from a music teacher in town, I wanted to try the piano too, so my mother took me to this piano teacher, and I took a couple of lessons. Well, I wasn't very good at playing the piano, and soon lost interest and dropped out.

Many women did needle point; one Austrian woman taught me how to needle point. There was a store in Salzburg that sold all the different kinds of yarn and ready designed doilies, tablecloths, and curtains. It was a beautiful well-stocked store, and you could find there all the different color threads and pretty little pillowcases, already outlined and ready to work on. I bought a tablecloth, curtains and a picture of a wine carafe with grapes, which I finally finished about eight years ago and is hanging in Florida on the wall. I carried that with me from Austria, including the thread, and worked on it all those years.

My parents made friends with one couple; they lived not far from us in the Maxglan area. Their name was Herr and Frau Graffmiller. On Weihnacht (Christmas) she used to bake cookies and all sorts of Holiday goodies, I was invited to their house and I was watching Frau Graffmiller bake these cookies and pastries. After they were done, she offered some to me, to take home for my family.

They were an older couple, and I don't think they had any children or grandchildren. Frau Graffmiller was always nice to me, and she would make a comment that I had a haimishes gesicht, which means that I looked like one of them. She is the one that taught me how to do needle point, and I was very busy doing that since the majority of people left, and there were just a handful of Jews left in our barrack

## **Chapter 8**

Chicago, Illinois, 1951

On a recent trip to Salzburg, we were told that there is a synagogue not far from the hotel where we had stayed; the street is called Juden Strasse. Our guide told us that there are about 100 Jews living in Salzburg now. Salzburg was a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. There is no place like the United States, with all its problems; it is still the best place to live.



Finally, we received our immigration papers bound for the United States of America. We were very excited and we never thought that this day will ever come; we had been waiting for a very long time, and finally decided to give up on our dream, and packed up most of our belongings, including bicycles, appliances and sent them to our family in Israel. My cousins Hazkel and Motel were handy and they were able to assemble them and put them to good use, and we were supposed to follow soon after.

However, when the immigration papers arrived from the United States of America, we changed course, and packed up whatever was left, and made ourselves available for the trip to America.

The immigration department gave us a very hard time before we were allowed to leave. That is the reason we remained so long in camp, and watched everybody leave. My father was accused of being a communist, and then he was told that he was too sick, maybe he wouldn't be able to work and support his family.

I, on the other hand, didn't want to move to America, I wanted to go to Israel, with all my friends from camp. The Israeli teachers taught us everything about Israel, the history, life on the Kibbutz, it sounded exciting for me. My mother only wanted to move to America, she told my father that my brother Moishe would be drafted into the army as soon as we arrived in Israel. He was just the right age to go into the Israeli army; the war was still going on between Israel and its Arab neighbors. My mother said that we deserve a better life, she suffered a lot during World War II, and America will be better for her family.

On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1951, we finally got permission and sailed to America. The name of the ship was called SS Stewart, it was an American Army ship and we picked it up in Bremenhaven, Germany. It seemed like a long voyage, we were at sea for days. A lot of people became ill; they were vomiting all over the place, and couldn't eat, they had no appetite. I was alright; we were running around, going up and down the different decks, it was fun. It was a very exciting time for us, we waited 5 years for that day and soon we would arrive to America, the Promised Land.

One day early in the morning, we saw the Statue of Liberty. What an exciting day, everybody was cheering, people were hugging each other, and everybody was screaming. What joy on the ship, we finally arrived in the United States of America. When we got off the ship, we were greeted by members of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Some people that arrived here had sponsors, such as family, perhaps close friends, but we didn't have anybody that was willing to sponsor us, and we are grateful to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee for



sponsoring us. They showed us where to go, what to do, and directed us to the train station that we were to take. Our destination was Chicago, Illinois. The American Government didn't want all the Jews to settle in New York, so we were distributed to different states. Our cousins that lived in Turkistan with us, the Dybners were sent to Florida, others went to Colorado, Texas, Ohio, and the rest of the country.

The train ride to Chicago was very pleasant, much different than the train that we took from Siberia to Central Asia, we all had our own assigned seats; there was no shoving and pushing. When we arrived in Chicago, we were greeted again by members of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. They took us to a hotel on the West Side of Chicago; the name of the hotel was called the Alamac. That is where all the refugees were placed until housing was found for them. If you had a family to sponsor you, it was the responsibility of the family to find accommodations for you. It was a small hotel, not fancy but adequate, we met several other families that have been there for a while and were waiting for apartments in the city.

We met some refugees that came a year before us; they came to see the new arrivals. These people lived in apartments not far from the hotel; the Joint helped some of them find the apartments. We made friends with some people that arrived earlier, and that is how I met my first friend in Chicago, her name was Jane, and she had a sister named Lillian. Jane was the same age as I was, and we became best of friends. I also became friends with Anna Copec; she lived with her father, brother and aunt. Her mother died during the war, of disease or hunger. I honestly don't remember because so many people died at that time, we didn't keep track of it. The Weingarten family that was in camp Beit Bialik, were also sent to Chicago, so we became reacquainted with them. Hannah Weingarten lived with her parents and brother Michael. I also met Goldie and her family. Goldie had a sister, who was younger, mother and father. Jane and I were inseparable at the time. We saw each other almost every day. I didn't like staying in the hotel that much, we had one room, and there was nothing to do. Moishe was hanging out with his friends; he met some boys his age that lived in our hotel, they arrived a few months before us. There was the Chevik family, two children and the parents. The boy was my brother's age and the girl was older than me. When we arrived at the Alamac Hotel, they were there already. They were waiting for an apartment and also looking for work. Moishe became friends with the Chevik boy; it was nice for each of us to have our own friends. I couldn't wait until we got our own apartment, again with help from Joint; we relocated to the South Side of Chicago. We moved into a two-bedroom apartment, with a kitchen a living room and one bathroom. It was located on 47<sup>th</sup> Street and Ellis Avenue. It was a very busy neighborhood, many multiple dwellings and a lot of traffic.



There were many children on our block; they were riding bicycles up and down the street, and it was very lively, even at night.

It was a multi family house, and we lived on the second floor. There was an old lady living on the top floor, her window faced the street. She always sat in front of the window and looked out to see what was happening below. She didn't seem to have any family, I never saw any visitors, and she appeared to be very lonely. She told me that she came to the United States from Ireland. I didn't know where Ireland was, but I knew that she wasn't Jewish. During Christmas, she would invite me up to her apartment, so I could help her decorate the Christmas tree. This was a first for me, I never saw a Christmas tree before. She also baked cookies, and gave some to me to take home. The weather was not so good in Chicago, I don't recall the winters being that cold for the short time we were there, but it was so hot in the summer, and we didn't know what to do to cool ourselves off. My father couldn't sleep at night; he went into the bathroom and filled up the tub with cold water, to cool himself off. It was such a hot apartment and we didn't have a fan, we didn't know that there was such a thing, so we suffered until the weather changed. The fall season was beautiful.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee supplied us with coupons for clothing; they paid our rent, until my father was able to find a job. We took our coupons to a big department store, I think it was Sears. There were racks and racks of clothing. It was the biggest store with clothing that I have ever seen. I couldn't make a decision what to buy. There was so much to choose from. The first item I picked out was a beige coat. And I picked out some skirts and a couple of blouses. I was thrilled, I ran from one rack to the next, everything was beautiful and new, it was hard to make a decision.

We met some Jewish people in our neighborhood, they appeared to be wealthy, and they lived in beautifully decorated apartments.

One couple that we met asked me if I would like to be a baby sitter, they lived in Hyde Park, a very nice neighborhood. They had a big apartment with beautiful carpeting, which covered the entire place. I agreed to baby sit since I like children, they had two little kids. I got paid 50 cents an hour. It was my first paying job and I liked the idea of having my own money.

After searching for a couple of months, my father finally found a job; it was a factory that manufactured windows and doors. There were many refugees working in that factory, a number of them came from Poland, but they were not Jewish. The atmosphere was not pleasant, and he came home every night exhausted. My mother never worked outside of the house, she was a good cook so she got a job cooking for an elderly man.



I was told to register for school, my parents still didn't speak English, and as a result I had no one to go with me to register, so I went by myself. That was a big mistake, I found out. I learned English in Salzburg, so I figured that the principal would place me in the proper class. I must have looked younger than my actual age, I think I told her how old I was, but I didn't have a birth certificate, and so I was placed in fourth grade.

The next day, I walked into class; imagine the shock, when I took one look at these nine year olds, while I was almost 14 or 15. I sat down at the desk that I was assigned, and started to cry. The teacher told me that if I do well in spelling, I would be promoted within a week to the next grade. Since I learned English in Salzburg, Austria, and my spelling was good for fourth grade, I was promoted after a week to the next grade, and I skipped the rest of the grades, until the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade was a little harder, so I went to summer school to catch up, and in the fall, I went into High School.

The high school that I was zoned for was Hyde Park High School. It was located in the South Side of Chicago, in a very nice neighborhood. I started in the fall as a freshman. I didn't know anybody and had no friends there. I found school hard; it was so much harder than grammar school. Geometry was one of the subjects that I had to take in the freshman year. It was hard for me, I never studied that type of math, but I did pass all the courses that first year, and I was promoted to the next grade, a sophomore.

While living on the South Side of Chicago, we met several other families, also refugees, like us and we had a lot in common. I met Zelda, she had a brother Noah and she lived with her parents, not far from us. I have a picture with Esther Suchar, another girl that lived in my neighborhood. There was Jerry Nuss, a very handsome young man, also a survivor. He was tall dark and handsome. Weekends, we would congregate in my house, there were boys and girls, some lived in my neighborhood, and others lived on the West Side of Chicago. We played games, listened to music; spin the bottle was one of the games that we played. We celebrated our first Passover Seder in Chicago, the first Seder in America.

I invited Zelda, for the first Seder, she sang some of the Passover songs. My parents enjoyed her company. My mother always remembered the Chicago Seders, and how Zelda helped us celebrate the Holiday with her singing.

When I was sixteen, my mother made me a sweet sixteen party. I guess she was told that people made parties for girls when they reach the age of sixteen. She invited all my friends to my party, my good friend Jane came; she lived on the North Side of Chicago, Zelda, Hannah, Goldie, Anna, and Leonard, a boy that I dated once in a while. I was also friends with a girl by



the name of Goldie; she lived with her sister and parents. My mother did all the cooking for the party, those days' people didn't cater in food, and mine was the only sweet sixteen party at the time. I invited all my new friends that I made since I have been living in Chicago. My parents bought me a record player and I bought some records. We listened to the music and also played spin the bottle.

After living in Chicago for a year, my parents sent me to a sleep away camp for two weeks. It was a Jewish Camp, provided by the same Jewish organization that sponsored our immigration to America, Joint. I went with my friend Anna Copec, we shared the same room. We sat next to each other on the same bus, she was little and I was a couple of years older than her, and some kids asked me if I was her mother. I loved camp, we had a great time. Anna lives in San Francisco, with her husband Leon. They have two daughters. One daughter is married and lives in San Francisco, and the other daughter lives in Los Angeles. She always remembers my birthday and never fails to call, to say hello and wish me a happy birthday. Anna is a retired teacher.

## Chapter 9

Jackson, New Jersey, 1953

My father worked very hard at his job in the factory, he came home every night exhausted. The workers were mean to him, and the foreman was pressuring him to produce more work. He was not very happy, and he didn't like working for somebody. He preferred to be his own boss. So when our friends, the Weingartens, were moving to Jackson, New Jersey, they asked us if we would like to join them, to be partners to a piece of property, and we would each have our own chicken farm. At the time, chicken farmers did well. That idea appealed to my father, he grew up on a farm before he moved to Wyszkwow, Poland, and he was born in a very small village not far from Wyszkwow. When they argued, my mother used to call him a small town boy - a farm boy.

After living in Chicago for two and a half years, we packed up our belongings and in 1953 we moved to Jackson, New Jersey. As soon as we moved to Jackson, I registered to school. The nearest high school was located in Lakewood, New Jersey. We always told people that we lived in Lakewood, New Jersey, because very few people heard of Jackson those



days, but Lakewood was a known resort town. Some people used to vacation in the wintertime, usually for the weekends. There were many hotels in Lakewood; Irvington was one of them - it was located on Route 9, it was a nice size hotel and it offered entertainment and all the meals inclusive.

We arrived in Jackson in October of 1953; my parents bought a small little house - a bungalow, there were two bedrooms and one bathroom, sitting on a piece of property which was 7 ½ acres. There were 3 bungalows in a row, we lived in one, the Weingartens in the other and the middle bungalow was rented out. The land and the bungalows were located on New Egypt Road, six miles from Lakewood, New Jersey. Across the street from our house were woods, and there were woods in the back of our house, it was rural and very quiet. We did all our shopping in Lakewood. There were neighbors near our house; on the right side of the house lived a young couple with two children, a boy and a girl. They were also refugees, and also had a farm like us with chickens and eggs. Their name was Kneller. After school, I used to visit the Knellers, she used to tell me how she survived the war and how the conditions were in the concentration camps that she was sent to. She was lucky to be alive. Her husband was also a survivor. After a couple of years, they sold the house and moved to the city - Lakewood, New Jersey. They decided that they didn't want to live on a farm any longer. At first they didn't like living in town, their neighbors were very hostile to them, and they didn't want refugees and Jews next door to them.

When we first arrived which was October, the fall season, it was beautiful, the leaves were changing colors, and we were surrounded by woods, the leaves were turning to red and gold. When we lived in Chicago, it was city living, the side walk in the summer was hot, there were no trees, only children playing in the street and people going to work in the morning and returning in the evening, but here in Jackson, you never saw people walking. We lived near the high way; it was called New Egypt Road. You didn't see any people walking, just cars going by. It was very rural and quiet. You just saw a house here and there, surrounded by trees. Right across the street from our house was a big forest. To right of us the Knellers lived and on the left of us, the middle bungalow was rented out and next to it, the Weingartens lived, our friends that moved from Chicago.

I loved living in Jackson at first; I took walks around our neighborhood admiring the scenery. I wrote letters to my friends in Chicago describing Lakewood, which was the big city and I also wrote about our farm, the chickens and eggs. How my parents had to get up early in the morning to feed the chickens and collect the eggs. It was very hard work, and both my parents worked hard. We also had to candle the eggs, to check for blood spots. Then they were put on a conveyer to size them, small, medium, large



extra large and jumbo. The little ones were called peevis. The eggs with the blood spots were not sold to the public. I helped out sometimes, I used to place the eggs on the conveyer to be weighed, and then put them in cartons. We had people stopping by and buying eggs directly from us. My father had to learn to drive and take a driving test. It was very hard for him, he didn't know the language and he had a difficult time passing the written test. Living on farm one has to drive a car or truck, there is no public transportation. My father failed the written test the first time, but he didn't give up and took it again, and passed. Neither my father nor mother could speak English well; they just knew enough to get by. My mother didn't learn to drive, so she was home all the time.

My mother was the one that got up early in the morning to feed the chickens and collect the eggs, while my father used to go to different places and sell them. He traveled to small towns in the surrounding area of New Jersey; stores, restaurants bakeries, and sometimes he sold eggs to individual families. Most of the time, he didn't even have an address, nor did he have directions. I think he didn't have an address because the way he used to get around in Poland, before the war. There weren't street signs, although the streets had names. The towns were small, and you used markers of trees and a certain house color to help you find your way. Sometimes it was even using the size of a house (big or small) to help you find your way. So, he was used to navigating that way, not with an address - per se - like in America. He got an address, but didn't write it down. He remembered the approximate location and made himself a sign, like a certain color door or a pole or perhaps the location was close to a certain highway. There were many times that he was stopped by a policeman due to an illegal turn, or failing to stop at a stop sign. Sometimes he got a speeding ticket for driving above the speed limit. When my father had to appear in court, my brother went with him, the judge had to explain what Dad did wrong. Most of the time, they didn't win, and the fine had to be paid.

Many of his customers didn't pay him right away, so he had to go back and collect the money. He had a list of people that owed him money. On many occasions, my brother went with him to collect what was due and we all wondered how our father managed to find all his customers without an address.

We had salespeople coming to the house; they were selling wheat and medicine for the chickens. My mother was in charge of the finances, while my father was selling the eggs. In the beginning of the season, we received thousands of little baby chicks. They were so cute and tiny, but before we were able to raise them, they had to be inoculated and that was done by a veterinarian that was sent from the company. The wheat we got on credit, and we would pay as money came in from the sales. My parents were



complaining that business was not good, the work was hard and there was very little money left after all the bills were paid. To supplement the income, my father got a part time job as an egg candler; it's hard work. Each egg has to be checked for blood spots. He worked in a cold dark room, and that he did in the evening. Right after we moved to Jackson, we needed to build a coop for the chickens, since that was the reason we moved there to begin with. We got a contractor, and my brother helped design the coop. There were many problems that came up while the coop was being built. The workers were not reliable, many days they didn't show up to work, and Moishe had to help out. After the coop was finished, it looked very good and it is very strong, it was built out of cinder blocks. After so many years, the coop is still standing there.

The middle bungalow that we shared with our neighbors, the Weingartens, we tried to rent out, to supplement our income. But we always seemed to get tenants that refused to pay the rent. When they first moved, they paid the first month rent, but soon after, they stopped paying. We tried to evict them, but it took a long time to get rid of them. The next tenant wasn't much better, and so it went.

I had finished the first year of high school in Chicago, so this was my sophomore year. School started already, and everybody knew each other, and I was the new kid on the block. Most of the kids knew each other from kindergarten; many of the families lived there for generations, and many were well to do. I was one of the few foreigners.

I didn't like the kids in school. They only knew that part of the world, and I thought they were small-minded, and not worldly. After going to school for a few months, I met a girl who was also a refugee, like me. Her name was Regina Korman; she lived in Howell Township, about a half hour from us. They didn't have a farm, her father worked as a laborer and her mother worked in a bakery. They were even poorer than us, we had a lot in common and we became best friends. Every weekend we spend in each other's houses. We were not in the same classes, because she was a year ahead of me. I was also friendly with Hannah Weingarten, who lived near us, that is the family we moved with from Chicago.

Mr. Weingarten had a kosher butcher store in Lakewood. Goldie and her family also moved from Chicago, they lived near Lakewood. Goldie's mother was a seamstress; she worked in the house, doing alterations.

Lakewood was a very busy town in the winter; it was considered a resort town with lots of hotels, big and small ones. Many people came to vacation here, a very popular hotel in town was called the Irvington, it was located on Madison Avenue; many people came for the weekends and during Christmas vacation.



There is a lake between Lakewood and Jackson and a small bridge, which you can take to go to Jackson, it is called New Egypt Road, also Road 529. Sometimes that lake would freeze, and you could go ice-skating in the winter. There were horse and buggy rides that some people liked to take, which was a fun thing to do. Lakewood had one movie theater and a popular diner where we used to hang out, it was on Route 9. I got a job in the Irvington Hotel as a hatcheck girl. A girl that I knew in High School asked me if I wanted to take over her concession as a hatcheck girl. I said yes, that sounds like fun. I hired my friend Regina to work for me; that was my first business venture. I liked working in the Irvington Hotel, especially in the winter season, when there were lots of hats to check. We got nice tips, but it didn't last very long, it was just a short time during the winter season. In the summer months, there was not much to do except going to the beach.

After the third year of High School, Regina and I decided to go to New York for the summer. She had an aunt, who lived on the Lower East Side, so she stayed with her. Her aunt had a very small apartment and there wasn't enough room for me to stay there. I met a girl named Helen, who lived in Brooklyn, and Helen was kind and invited me to stay with her family for the entire summer. I got a job with I. Miller Shoes, which was located in Queens, so I had to travel from Brooklyn to Queens by train. A whole new world opened up for me, we would go out at night, there was a park nearby, we met many boys and girls, mostly refugees like me. We had a lot in common, and I loved the city. After the summer, we went back to Lakewood, I had one more year of school and my friend Regina graduated that year. She moved to Manhattan and lived on the Lower East Side with her aunt.

## Chapter 10

New York, New York, 1956

I told my parents that I didn't want to live in Jackson on a farm after I graduate High School and told them that I would like to move to Manhattan. Of course, my parents were against my moving to the big city. I didn't have any money and had no place to live. But I hated Jackson; I loved the city, and wanted to live in New York.

Those days, young girls lived at home until they got married. My parents were very upset with me, but there were no opportunities for me in Jackson, New Jersey. My best friend moved and as soon as I graduated, I packed a suitcase and boarded a bus from Lakewood to the city. After I paid



for the bus fare, I was left with \$1.50 in my pocket. My mother didn't want me to go, so she didn't give me any money. After I got off the bus with my suitcase in my hand, a man approached me and asked if I wanted to go with him. He took out a big roll of money, and told me that he will find me a job and a place to live.

Of course, I said no thank you; I took a train to my friend Regina's house. I stayed with Regina and her aunt for a few weeks until I found a room across the street from Regina's apartment. It was Regina's aunt who found the room for me; I was a boarder with Mrs. Pfefferbaum, who happened to live across the street from Regina. Mrs. Pfefferbaum lived alone, she was either in her eighties or nineties and she decided to rent out one of her rooms. She was a lonely old lady, and for entertainment she would sit by the window and look down at the action on the street.

As soon as I moved in, I started to look for a job, I learned typing and stenography in high school. My typing teacher told me if you know how to type, you can always find a job. I looked in the newspaper everyday, and checked off all the companies that advertised for positions as typists, secretaries and stenographers. I went for interviews, and every time I was told that I was a girl from a small town, and soon I would tire from the big city and I will go back to my small town. It was very frustrating, I couldn't pay rent and I didn't have any money for food. Mrs. Pfefferbaum was very patient and gave me some more time to find a job.

Somebody suggested that I go to a Jewish Agency and they will help me find a job. That is what I did, I went and they sent me to Chief Apparel, a men's outerwear company. I had an interview with Mr. Mahler and he didn't even give me a test and hired me on the spot as a typist. The company was located on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I lived on Avenue C in lower Manhattan, and I took the bus to work. Mr. Mahler was the credit manager and my job was to type his letters, and anybody else that needed a letter typed. I was a good worker, I was always on time or early and I was a good typist. They seemed to be happy with my work.

As soon as I was earning money, I started to go out on dates. I met a young man on a boat going to Manhattan. This was a High School graduation present from my parents. It was just a day trip, to see Manhattan and spend the day. This young man I met happened to live in New York. He took my telephone number and after I moved in to Mrs. Pfefferbaum's apartment, he called. We started to date, he told me that he wasn't Jewish, he was from Yugoslavia, and he was Christian. After a few dates, I told him that I couldn't marry him because he wasn't Jewish. He did ask me to marry him, and he introduced me to his family. I met his mother and his father. They seemed nice but not very friendly. Maybe they didn't like me because he may have told them that I was Jewish. He was an engineer and



weekends he worked in Coney Island, selling tickets for the rides. Somebody introduced me to another young man; his name was Richie, who was also an engineer. He took me to very nice places; one of them was Tavern on the Green.

My friend Jane from Chicago came to visit me, she also had a date, and the four of us went to Tavern on the Green. Those days Jane would often visit me and we used to double date when we had dates. In 1957, Jane got married and I was invited to her wedding and I flew to Chicago for the occasion. I stayed with her sister, Lillian, who was married already and she had a small child. It was one-bedroom apartment, and I slept on the couch. Jane got married and left for her honeymoon soon after the wedding. I decided to stay in Chicago a little longer and see the sights and visit some of my old friends. A day or so after the wedding, Lillian asked me whether I would like to go shopping on Kedzie Avenue, which was a very popular shopping center, there were stores and restaurants, and it was a busy street. I always like to go shopping, but that day for some strange reason that I can't explain, I declined. I said that I didn't feel like shopping, and went elsewhere. Well, Lillian went with her baby in a stroller and another friend.

A few hours later, I received a call that Lillian was killed. A man driving a car went on the sidewalk and killed Lillian and her friend. The baby was saved, because she pushed the baby and the stroller across the street, as she saw the car coming towards her. Jane came back from her honeymoon; it was a terrible tragedy. I couldn't stay in Lillian's apartment any longer, and went to another friend. The tragedy was written up in the Jewish Paper, it was called the Forward. My father always read the Forward and he spotted the article. They immediately called Chicago, trying to locate me. They didn't know where I was, they knew that I went to Jane's wedding, but they didn't know where I was staying, but they found me. You can imagine the relief, when they heard my voice. I was lucky that day, for not going shopping with Lillian and her friend. Jane, her sister Lillian and her family survived the Holocaust, but Lillian had to die in a freak accident. After a few more days in Chicago, I went back to New York, to my little room in Mrs. Pfefferbaum's apartment and my job at Chief Apparel.

## **Chapter 11**

Brooklyn, New York 1957-59

About a year or so later, my company moved to 10 West 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, uptown. It was a much nicer office and in a great location in midtown of



Manhattan. The office was located on 33<sup>rd</sup> street, right across from the Empire State Building. On my lunch hour I would shop across the street at Ohrbachs, which was a big department store. I used to meet some girls for lunch; they were also refugees like me. There was Esther and Marlene. After working there for about two years, Mr. Kuhn, who was the owner of the company and he also had a sister in law working with him, they decided to hire an efficiency expert to figure out how the company can save money. They fired a lot of people, including a stenographer. Maybe she was earning more money than me, and I was lucky that they kept me on. Mr. Mahler, who was my immediate boss, taught me how to type on a Dictaphone. He would talk into a machine and make a tape, and he gave me the tape after he finished talking, for me to transcribe on paper. I put earphones on and listened to the tape, if I didn't understand a word, I would go back. Mr. Mahler spoke clear and it was easy to understand him; some other people didn't have such a clear voice, and I would have to go back frequently. I liked the Dictaphone, better than stenography, because I could always go back if I didn't understand something, whereas in stenography if you didn't write down the right symbol or you missed a word or the notes got cold, than you had a hard time transcribing them. They were always hiring new girls, and some women worked part time, but few lasted a long time, they either didn't like working at Chief Apparel or they were let go.

They needed a receptionist for the front desk, because the girl they hired, who happened to be beautiful, couldn't really type and wasn't good at her job. She was hired for her beauty but they also needed her to do some work. I became friendly with her; she lived with her family in Long Beach, Long Island. They were a wealthy family and she was spoiled; everywhere she went, the boys would flock to her. She was fired from her job as a receptionist and my boss needed a replacement.

I was asked if I would like to be a receptionist until they hired another girl. I said 'yes' I will try it. The job was easier than typing a whole day; I met people as they came in, and didn't have to work so hard.

The beginning of the season was very busy, which was the end of August or the beginning of September. We had buyers from all over the country come in to buy merchandise for their stores. I met the buyers from Macy's and Robert Hall, which was our biggest customer.

Some buyers were friendly, and said hello when they walked in, others were not that friendly. I had to remember each person's name as they walked in; some would get insulted if I didn't recognize them. I liked working there, the pay was not that good. I earned \$65.00 a week. I still managed to save, go on vacation and buy clothes. I shopped on my lunch hour; since I was a receptionist, I had to dress nice. I bought pretty dresses



in Ohrbachs for \$5.00 a dress. I became friendly with one of the older women in my office, and when her daughter was getting married, she invited me to the wedding. It was my first wedding invitation, I went shopping and found a beautiful dress for a \$1.50. It was on sale, it was a long green dress and short sleeves; it looked very pretty on and I wore it to the wedding. Even those days a \$1.50 was cheap for a dressy evening dress.

Regina and I joined HES, which is a Hebrew Educational Society; we met a lot of new people. Most of the people that went to the HES were refugees, and we had a lot in common. I met somebody by the name of Sol Ginzburg that I dated for a while. Regina and I were looking to move in together, she didn't want to live with her Aunt for the rest of her life and I also wanted my own space. One day Regina was talking to one of the boys that she met at the HES, and he told her that there is an apartment available that she could share with another girl, her name was Gladys. It was a one-bedroom apartment, but Regina said that she wouldn't move unless there was room for me. Regina and I moved in with Gladys and we put another bed in the bedroom. We shared the rent and the expenses; we all worked. Regina and Gladys were bookkeepers and I worked for Chief Apparel. We had a lot of fun, there were always people visiting us after work. That is where I learned to dance. Some of the boys were very good dancers, and those days Latin Music was very popular, Tito Puente was my favorite.

We continued going to the HES, and one day I met a young man that caught my attention, not for me, but I thought my friend Regina might like him. I invited him up to our apartment to meet Regina. It was love at first sight, and they started to date, and were inseparable. A year later they got married.

One day I saw an advertisement in the News Paper, it advertised a six-week course in dancing and if you qualify, you will be placed as a dance instructor. The name of the dance studio was Fred Astaire. I called the studio, and took the six-week course. After the six weeks I was picked for the job as a dance instructor. This was a part-time job for me because I worked for Chief Apparel during the day. My job was to sign up people for dance classes and then teach them to dance. I thought I will be a dancer and not a teacher.

After a week, I quit. I had a full time job during the day, and I found it too difficult; working a whole day and then come home and go to work at night. I still went dancing at night, but for pleasure. Those days there were Jewish Organization and Temples that sponsored dances, where young people could meet. We checked the newspaper where the next dance was being held, and a whole bunch of us got together and off we went dancing.



Gladys, Regina, and I lived on Amboy Street, in Brooklyn, New York. Many years ago, Amboy Street was known to have gangs, but we didn't have any problems. During the week, Regina, Gladys and I were busy working and on weekends, it was time to clean the place. Some times the girls were annoyed with me, because some weekends, I would go to Jackson to visit my parents, so I couldn't clean the apartment. Regina was the tallest of the three of us, while Gladys and I were about the same height, and she and I would wear each other's clothes.

After living on Amboy Street for about a year and a half, Regina decided to get married; she married Albert, the young man that I invited to our apartment. Right after that, Gladys's parents were arriving from Bolivia, and moved back into Gladys's apartment. There was not enough room for all of us, and I wanted my own place anyway.

I found another apartment to share with a girl named Evelyn, she lived there alone, and it was right near Ebbetsfield, where they played baseball. It was a two-bedroom apartment; I had my own room, and it was on the ground level, which I didn't like so much, because everybody could look into the apartment when they passed by. We shared the rent and the expenses, and I was able to save money.

My roommate had a French accent; she was a tall thin girl with dark hair. She never talked about her parents or siblings and I never met any members of her family. I did, however meet some of her friends. She had a friend by the name of Adela, a blond very busty girl. She had such a huge bust and a small waistline; she had a hard time fitting into clothes. One time she bought a knitted black bathing suit, after wearing it once, she decided it was too small for her, so she donated it to me. Evelyn and Adela were both refugees, from France and Italy. Adela worked for the United Nations; we would occasionally go out together, and sometimes she would invite me to the United Nations when they had special events. It was usually in the evening and dinner was served. I met some interesting people from different countries. Most of the people that I met there were young men and women, from Sweden and Denmark.

I went out with them a couple of times, but I didn't like them. They were not loyal, one day they were with you and the next time, they didn't know who you were. It was fun while it lasted.

My roommate, Evelyn, was a member of the 92 Street Y, in Manhattan, and she used to go there after work to participate in the evening programs they had. She asked me to go with her, and one day I went to see if there was anything that I was interested in. They had an acting class, and they were putting on a play. The name of the show was called "Jonah and the Whale" I got a small part in the show. That was my first acting job, I was very



nervous. They were selling the tickets for one dollar, and all the seats were sold out.

There were a lot of people in the audience, and I didn't think that I would remember my lines. I was told not to look at the audience, make believe nobody is there, and since the theater is dark, that made it a little easier. That was my only acting job.

During the Holidays, when I was off from work, I used to go to Jackson to visit my parents. One year, this was 1958; I decided to spend Thanksgiving in Brooklyn, New York. My cousin Betty Dybner, who lived in Queens, New York at the time, invited me to spend Thanksgiving in her sister's house. I accepted the invitation; in the meantime I got another invitation for Thanksgiving Dinner in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. I had a friend who had just gotten married; her name was Betty, too. We called her little Betty because she was shorter than my cousin Betty. She and her husband Leon decided to make a Thanksgiving Dinner and invite some single friends. I didn't really want to go there because I already accepted an invitation to my cousin Betty, but they insisted, telling me that there will be single boys and girls. I finally accepted, and I met my husband that evening. I think the reason I was invited to that dinner, was due to the fact that an old boyfriend of mine was also coming to dinner, and these friends wanted us to get together again. While we were having dinner, this young man became ill, and ran out of the house and left everybody looking puzzled, and lost for words. During dinner, he was sitting quietly, not speaking to anybody. Every now and then, he would glance at me, not saying a word. I found out later that he had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized for about two years. I dated him for about six months before breaking up with him. My parents liked him, but they were anxious for me to get married, I was getting older, I was almost 22 years old and still single. Those days anybody past the age of 25 years old was considered an old maid. I still had a couple of years to go. His name was Alex, and I was told that he was very smart in school, he was an engineer. His parents were looking for a religious girl for him and I wasn't religious enough.

After Thanksgiving Dinner, a young man by the name of Norman and a friend asked me if I needed a ride home and I said yes, that would be nice, and I left with them. There was another girl that was invited to that Thanksgiving Dinner, but she couldn't come, she was supposed to be matched up with Norman. So it was meant to be that I should meet Norman. After I came home, I thought to myself, Norman seemed like a nice guy, I think I will marry him. He called like he said he would and a year later, we got married.

I did not have an easy life and married life was not easy either. I made my own wedding; my parents were poor farmers and couldn't afford to make



me a wedding. The war left scars on both of us, and we had a very hard time. When we got married, the Rabbi said, for better or worse and in sickness and health. Well, it was true, sometimes it was better and many times, it was worse. We have been married for 53 years and have three wonderful children, Nathaniel, Warren and Michelle, and four beautiful grandchildren, Jessica, Sarah, Noah and Hannah.

## **Chapter 12**

Florida and Staten Island, 2012

We are retired now and live six months in Florida and six months in Staten Island, New York. Florida is a good place to spend the winters, the houses are all air-conditioned, and the weather is just right during the winter season. Summers are hot, but by that time, we are back up North.

I miss living closer to my children and grandchildren, they moved away when they went to college and never came back. We look forward to their visits, either to Florida or Staten Island, and maybe one day they will move near us.

My father passed away in 1975, he died of kidney failure at the age of 69. As far as I can remember, he was always sick. My mother died in 1986, she was 81 years old and died of congestive heart failure. My brother Morris, which is his English name lives in Brooklyn, by himself. He is 80 years old now.